

# GSAPS THE SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

## INTERNATIONAL ROLE CONSTRUCTION AND ROLE-RELATED IDEA CHANGE: THE CASE OF JAPAN'S DISPATCH OF SDF ABROAD

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"Japan must contribute and play roles befitting its power status."

"What role should Japan play in the international society?"

It is not an exaggeration to say that the concern about "international role" – as commonly used interchangeably with "international contribution" in Japan – is one of the most influential forces that have been shaping the foreign policy and external behavior of Japan over the recent decades. "International role" and "contribution" have become prevalent terms in the Japanese policy discourse since the country became widely recognized as an economic power, especially when its power started to adversely affect its friends abroad in the 1980s. It is appropriate to say that today the issue of international role constitutes an institution – another established pillar – in Japan's postwar foreign policy, in addition to the principle of the Peace Constitution and the Japan-U.S. security alliance. But while the latter institutions largely serve as sources for passivism and inertia, the issue of role propels Japan towards the course of active involvement in international affairs and the management of world order. Many critical actions have been carried out under this banner, including activities in areas that used to be off-limits to the "peaceful" Japan, such as sending the Self-Defense Force abroad and giving logistical support to the U.S.-led military operation in Afghanistan.

Appreciating the prevalence and the long history of the debate on the issue of role in Japan as well as in the academic circles outside Japan, this research tries to ask questions and approach the problem from a new perspective. Rather than trying to describe or analyze the international roles that Japan plays, or to suggest *what* role Japan can or ought to play, I seek to understand the process of *how* Japan comes up with particular roles which it consistently engages in on the world stage. By scrutinizing the changes that led to the overseas dispatch of the SDF in particular, this research attempts to shed light on the process of role construction and evolution in the highly controversial field of security and peace. Concretely, the research questions include why Japan had to address the problem of its international role in the first place. What kind of motives, rationales and principles propelled the nation to try to carve out its international roles? and why and how have the policy and practice of role changed in the way that bypassed the postwar tradition in the form of sending the SDF abroad?

Tracing this phenomenon back to the 1980s, this research shows that the problem of international role emerged as a prominent foreign policy and national issue as the Japanese society tried to cope with the country's change to power status. Japan's strength, although strictly in economic terms, increased suspicion as well as expectations from other states. Inside Japan, new ways of thinking – the Copernican shift in rationales – were formulated as it endeavored to present itself to others and to establish a new principled foundation for its existence and a course of actions as a world power. This research demonstrates that the process of role construction and evolution did not occur in Japan's domestic society in isolation from the outside world and forces from abroad. Rather, Japan's international role has been continuously shaped by the Japanese understanding of the societal demands, expectations and requirements in certain issues at the international level. This understanding came from accumulative learning through communications and interactions with other

countries. In this way, Japan acquired a sense of which actions were appropriate and acceptable; and this understanding fundamentally affected the country's behavior and the way it constructed its international role.

Considering the role construction and change as a complex social phenomenon, I try to understand this problem by using an IR constructivist lens. This approach allows us to grasp social aspects of events and incorporate ideational variables and social processes into analysis. It is indispensable to combine different variables into the framework – material situations (the change in Japan's capability, international circumstances) along with sociopolitical processes that interpret and give meaning to them. It is essential also to take factors and processes at two levels into account – international level interactions (common agendas, external expectations and demands) and domestic politics and policy making processes.

By analyzing the discourse among policy authorities and opinion leaders in Japan, I try to understand how the variables and factors mentioned above are perceived and blended into the agents' minds, as well as how these agents pick up or refer to sets of logics and principles to rationalize, justify and advocate certain actions; how they communicate, persuade the public and form new intersubjective meanings on the issue. I also pay attention to how these agents who serve as policy or norm entrepreneurs try to inculcate new ways of thinking, rationales and principles about the importance of having international role to the mass by using various rhetorical strategies, metaphors, myths and analogies. The research pays attention to the complex political tradeoffs among different groups of policy opinions and beliefs to create a consensus as a basis for performing international role. By doing so, this research can provide a holistic insight into how Japan comes up with the roles it is now playing in the global security today.

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